

Globalization and Education: Impacts on Classroom Practice

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Globalization and Education:**Impacts on Classroom Practice in British Columbia****Description**

The project we collaborated on was one piece of a much larger study. Begun in 2003 by Carlos Alberto Torres and the Paulo Freire Institute (PFI) at the University of California in Los Angeles, participants from 16 nations including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Portugal, Taiwan, and the United States organized a series of conferences stretching from 2004 until 2009 to jointly study the effects of globalization on education. Specific aims were to; “study teachers’ views, perceptions and aspirations in the face of education reform in the last twenty-five years in each system, determine the influence of globalization on teachers’ lives and classroom practices” and “to seek empirical evidence about the extent social and economic policies play in globalization and its influence in teachers’ lives around the world” (Education and Globalization Research Steering Group, 2005; Appendix 2)

The objectives of the study were:

- To understand globalization as an historical phenomenon,
- To look at possible changes in the role of teachers and extent practices are impacted by globalization,
- To identify possible patterns in the manners in which schooling practices reflect the realities of an interdependent global economy, and
- To understand the extent to which teachers have responded to articulating, reproducing, and resisting these norms.

The final product will be a set of book length reports that document what teachers from around the globe identify as the effects of globalization.

In Canada, this research will take place in both Ontario and British Columbia. Dr. Hans Schuetze of the Education Department at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Larry Kuehn, Director of Research and Technology for the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) are organizing the British Columbian portion of the Canadian research.

How we fit into the Study

As applied anthropology students, we had two aims in the globalization project. First, our duty to the class meant that we had to document, and then report to classmates and community members about the process of conducting collaborative research. Secondly, we were to take part in collaborative ethnographic research which required us to tailor our research around the interests of the researchers and research participants we worked with paying close attention to the power dynamics inherent in the ethnographic process (Lassiter, 2005).

We chose to work on an ongoing study of the impacts of globalization on teaching in British Columbia and to this end contacted Larry Kuehn, Director of Research and Technology at the British Columbia Teacher's Federation via e-mail. He invited us to attend a focus group on January 31, 2006 at the BCTF building. At the focus group we met with both Larry Kuehn and Dr. Hans Schuetze. After listening and participating in the focus group with a group of Elementary School teachers from the Greater Vancouver area we clarified our role in the study. Larry Kuehn and Hans Schuetze requested that we assist them in collecting stories from teachers that documented how globalization was affecting their classroom practice. We would conduct interviews and analyze recorded data from focus groups that were facilitated by Larry Kuehn and Hans Schuetze.

The Process

Our research progressed smoothly and consisted of interviews, focus groups, and meetings between both ourselves and with Larry Kuehn and Hans Schuetze. Initially we each undertook to interview one person. Stephanie conducted her interview with a Vancouver Distance Education elementary teacher in person, Carol conducted her interview with a Surrey Elementary teacher over the phone, and Elena attempted to conduct an interview via e-mail. When this created difficulty, she (finally) managed to interview the current Vice President of the Abbotsford BCTF, who was previously an Abbotsford secondary teacher, over the phone (Appendices 10-12). Three focus groups were conducted, only one of which we attended (the first focus group was conducted the previous August 2005, and the third focus group was conducted in Kelowna)(Appendices 7-9). We were given recordings of all three focus groups so that we could transcribe them. Overall, 23 teachers participated in the interviews and focus groups that were analysed in our research.

The Issues as identified by the collaborative partners

Both the focus groups and the interviews were centred around a list of issues that our collaborative partners had developed. Larry Kuehn and Hans Schuetze identified a list of issues that they saw as impacts of globalization. The list was circulated amongst the teachers who were interested in participating in the focus groups to help them stay on topic. These issues were Privatization, Professionalization of teachers, Competition, Funding, Commercialization, Management, control, and planning, Curriculum changes, Learning Resources and Technology.

Transcribed focus groups and interview notes were thematically analyzed using the issues list as an initial guide for coding. Interview notes were checked with the interviewees in order to ensure that statements had not been misrepresented. Through a series of meetings we discussed and developed the themes and built an understanding of the relationships between the codes, which were

at times intertwined in complex ways. We also built a clear picture of the sub-themes which were incorporated under each theme providing nuance to our analysis.

The Problems

The problems that arose caused minor delays, but were not insurmountable. Initially, contacting Larry Kuehn was delayed by the fact that he was in Korea attending a meeting about the progress of the international Globalization study. The delay in contact was fortuitous because the third member of our research group, Carol, joined the class late. Since we had yet to make contact with our collaborative partner, Carol's late arrival caused no problems. The second challenge was that the focus group was timed in a way that we could not all attend. Because we received a recording of the focus group from Larry the following week, the losses incurred were minimized. Elena also encountered major difficulties in accessing an interviewee.

Meetings between ourselves and with our collaborators were not easy to schedule, as one member of our group commutes from Washington, and another of our members has four children to care for as well as attend class. Larry Kuehn and Hans Schuetze are also both very busy people. Transcription, we also discovered, can be very time consuming. For every two hour long focus group, each of us spent an average of 6 hours in transcription. The difficulties lie in discerning who is speaking and what is being said, as well as what is *meant* by what is being said. We also encountered challenges with our interviews; none of us had access to recording devices that could be used over the phone or in person, so we were forced to rebuild the interviews from notes we had taken.

The final difficulty we encountered lay in negotiating analytical frameworks, both within our group and with collaborators. After processing the information we had received from the focus groups, our research team developed a framework for organizing what we had learned. Our collaborators preferred a different framework that focused more closely on the initial list of issues

that they had developed. This meant that we as a team had to reevaluate our framework and reorganize our research accordingly.

Findings

Definitions of Globalization

“I see globalization as corporations driving the car that’s spinning the globe.”

- Francophone elementary school teacher

As our co-researchers on the project wanted to begin each focus group and interview with a discussion of what globalization actually is, we chose to frame our report accordingly. Teachers had varying concepts of globalization that fell generally within two categories. Most teachers saw globalization as an economic phenomenon, which is the definition that Dr. Schuetze adhered to.

Teachers also recognized globalization as potentially positive; it could refer to broader cultural variation and increased communication. In the words of one Coquitlam elementary school teacher, “I see globalization as a good thing with potential pitfalls. There is a western focus in the current curriculum and with globalization students can communicate with people in different countries. Correctly managed it creates incredible opportunities.” This teacher wanted to focus on the learning opportunities increased communication can bring. The general consensus, however, was bleak; cultural variation, teachers say, is being subsumed by Western culture. Large, multinational corporations are shifting jobs from Canada to countries with lower labour costs, and Canadian citizens are losing out.

Globalization is also seen by teachers in the effects that it produces by following an economic, business-oriented model of the world. The issue list sums up the different aspects teachers recognized as caused by globalization. Competition and economic success were the two aspects that teachers most readily focused on.

How the BC Ministry of Education frames the issues

The British Columbia Ministry of Education frames its future vision in a ‘service plan’ in which it outlines the major goals, objectives and performance measures of its ‘Business Plan’ (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005 see Appendix 3.). Using this type of language, the service plan posits its goals for the Province as:

- Improved student achievement and
- A high quality performance oriented education system

The term ‘improved’ is not directly defined in the service plan summary document that is released on the government website. However, several press releases from the Minister suggest that increased choice is considered essential to achieving this goal (for example British Columbia Select Standing Committee on Education, 2002) and the Province’s goal of becoming ‘the most literate jurisdiction in North America’ suggests a focus on technical literacy (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2005). In addition, some insight is given in the report of the Special Standing Committee on Education which quotes the then Deputy Minister of Education saying “The Committee notes that quantitative measures such as graduation rates, number of graduate degrees conferred, success of Aboriginals, success of new Canadians, and adult illiteracy rates indicate that British Columbia cannot consider itself to be world-class, despite the fact that its expenditures on a per student basis is among the “highest per-pupil spending in Canada” (Emery Dossdall, Ministry of Education, Victoria stakeholder meeting, October 16, 2001 cited in (British Columbia Select Standing Committee on Education, 2002 p. 22). This suggests a combined focus on efficient use of funds and the need to improve the education services supplied to the most disadvantaged social groups.

Ways to Increase funds

We identified four main sub-headings under ways to increase funds (See Appendix 4).

These are attracting more students, corporate funding, improving efficiency, and funding from parents.

Attract More Students

Increasing student population increases the overall per-capita funds allocated to a school. In addition extra funding is available for some specialized programs from the federal government. International students also bring direct increases in funding to schools through private payments.

School Ranking

The teachers we interviewed demonstrated the pivotal role played by standardized testing and school rankings in the competitive process of attracting additional students to a school. In the elementary schools standardized tests have been implemented in grades 4 and 7 and in some schools are also being used in kindergarten classes. In high school, standardized tests have been in use for Grade 12 students for some time, however they were introduced for Grade 10s in 2005.

Teachers are experiencing pressure from many sides with regard to the standardized tests. Many expressed confusion over why this approach was being adopted when British Columbia schools currently perform very well in comparison to other jurisdictions and similar approaches such as the USA's "No child left behind" policy are widely acknowledged to be, as one teacher put it, "a colossal mess".

School Superintendents expect good standardized test (Foundational Skills Assessment, or FSA) scores from school principals who, in turn put pressure on teachers to improve school performance on the tests. For many teachers the emphasis placed on test scores is having a negative

impact on classroom practice. Teacher's expressed considerable frustration at being required to focus on testable literacy and numeracy skills often to the exclusion of other curriculum areas that they view as equally important. For example a Kelowna elementary teacher stated:

"The language arts and English prescribed learning outcomes actually have things like visual representation and viewing theoretically taken into account. But the standardized tests [...] only take into account the ones that we're calling academic, the reading and the writing, which are measurable. You can't necessarily measure [...] a student's artistic ability. So even though it's a learning outcome, because you're not going to get it on the FSA [it isn't promoted]."

At the secondary level teachers are concerned that standardized tests are leading to the loss of elective courses as critical classroom time is devoted to improving student outcomes on the tests. "In Kelowna middle schools there has been a push to reduce the number of courses from 8 to 7 reducing electives (art and technology of course are the ones that go)... the reason is standardized testing driving numeracy and literacy and the emphasis is on 15 minutes more numeracy and literacy at the expense of arts and breadth" (Kelowna secondary teacher). Some teachers support standardized testing, apparently concurring with the government position that such testing provides objective criteria for improvement. As one Surrey secondary school teacher noted: "Some teachers in my school want Grade 8 tested. It is not all top down"

Teachers are also concerned about the manner in which standardized test results are being used by the Fraser Institute in lobbying the government and parents with regard to schooling. The Fraser Institute report (Cowley and Easton, 2005) emphasizes that test scores have been found to be associated with socio-economic status. However, they provide statistics in formats that can be (and are being) used to augment economic divisions between different catchment areas, as well as promoting private schools who (unsurprisingly) tend to score better on the tests due to the higher levels of resources available in these schools. As one Okanagan elementary-school teacher explained: "an extraordinary conundrum is how to make us in the public system look good without

buying into the measurements that parents pay attention to. At the beginning of the school year I had a gentleman come up to me and say, ‘We just moved from Toronto and we moved to this area because your school scored well on that Fraser Institute test’.

Finally, while one Coquitlam elementary school teacher noted that FSA’s were sometimes used to target programs such as “Roots of Empathy” and “Early Learning” to the most needy schools, other teachers were frankly shocked by teaching strategies that were being suggested to them with regard to FSA’s. A particularly poignant example comes from an Okanagan kindergarten teacher who reported:

“The superintendent came to our school this year and said ‘Congratulations, you are the worst school in the school district’. He was talking about FSA scores. So our principal said, here are all the programs we run. [...] What else do you suggest we do? We are in a very low economic area of town, and there are some real problems here. [The superintendent’s] advice...was, “choose the 15 kids whose results you can move on those FSA scores and spend all your resources on those 15 kids. Forget about the kids who could not possibly raise their scores, forget those who will already do well. Pick those kids whose results you can move and your results will look better next year.”

Such a strategy would clearly ignore both the most vulnerable and the brightest students and is ethically questionable.

Improve Teaching through Accountability

The impacts of standardized tests are not limited to the assessment of students. Increasingly, standardization is also seen as a mechanism for assessing teachers. The interrelationships between standardized testing and teacher accountability plans are clear to teachers and many feel insulted by what they see as “the constant targeting of teachers by the government and the media”. Even the Vancouver School Board raises the contentiousness of accountability plans on its website, noting “the apparent conflict between what we know to be good classroom assessment practices and the

accountability measures used by the Ministry, which many perceive to have little meaning in the classroom” (Vancouver School Board, 2004)

Teachers note that a variety of testing initiatives are being used to assess teacher’s performance assisted by centralized computer data systems which enable the instantaneous retrieval not only of student and school results, but also of the performance of individual teachers. Stated one teacher,

“We have school wide ‘writes’ Every Monday, students complete a writing assignment that is marked by a standardized format. Classroom performance on these writes is being looked at and where this is all headed to is teacher evaluation-and we should not be using it this way. My principal more or less admitted that this is how performance standards for teachers are going to be made.”

Teacher’s find this manner of accountability testing disturbing because they are acutely aware of the interplay between socio-economic status and educational results and do not think that it is fair to expect them to inspire results that equal those of the best schools in classrooms which often have high levels of special needs and ESL children. They also find the additional stresses that they find themselves under as a result of testing to be nonsensical because they are aware that “currently teaching is a profession that no-one wants to go into” and that there is “huge shortage of teachers at the moment”. The loss of morale that created by the stress and the targeting is brought home by a Surrey Elementary teacher who stated “10 years ago you’d never ask anyone, ‘How long until you retire?’ It was somehow rude and not something that would have been talked about unless in a teasing way. But nowadays people talk about retirement all the time. They say ‘oh I’ve only got 8 years to go.’”

Specialized Programs

Another popular strategy employed by schools to increase enrolment is the adoption of specialized programs, many of which are federally funded thus providing extra financial resources for schools. The most common of these is French Immersion, although schools also have other language immersion programs and even specialist sports programs such as hockey. These specialized programs make schools more attractive to parents from outside the school catchment area and tend to attract students from higher socio-economic backgrounds whose parents are (generally) more able to devote time to their children's education and to transport them a longer distance to school.

Schools with specialized programs generally also have non-specialized streams and it is here that teachers note the increase of inequity in these types of schools. A Surrey Elementary teacher stated that "all the students who are confident learners and have support at home head into French programs. So we get one class of Grade 5 (30) students who are all the best students and then we have the other 60 who are the middle to low learners. [...] So the teachers of those non-French grade 5 classes end up with a way higher percentage of special needs children and learning disabled children."

Generally, teachers recognized that choice favours more privileged families and tends to discriminate against poorer families. So an Okanagan Elementary teacher said:

"There are huge debates with the school district about how to reconcile school choice on one hand with catchment areas. Say a child is living literally across the street from the school that is popular. If the school is well ranked, then those parents who can afford to have one parent stay at home and drive the kids all over the city will take their child there, and the poor child whose mother is working 2 or 3 jobs at minimum wage can't even take her child across the street to go to school anymore. The idea of choice is very appealing. It's freedom, it's control of your destiny. But if you're on the wrong end of the economic scale, then there is no choice."

International Students

Another route that schools can use to increase their funding is by declaring themselves to be an “international school”. Revenues to BC schools from international students have been increasing rapidly. In 2001 \$20 million were raised, while in 2005 this figure had increased to \$100 million¹. Several teachers noted that each international student earns over \$10,000 for the school district providing schooling for the student and that a portion (typically between \$1000 and \$2000) are provided to the school. Teacher’s complaints focused on the fact that very little of this funding seems to translate into additional support for teachers. International schools tend to be located in middle class neighborhoods and to have relatively high scores on standardized tests, as a way of attracting foreign students. A key concern eloquently expressed by a Vancouver elementary teacher is that the high ratios of beginner ESL students impacts the outcomes of their classmates. “In a class of 29 students, I have 6 that speak English as a first language and I have 12 level one students (lowest level of English proficiency). I have no support, period. [...] It causes me concern that the students who have English as a first language aren’t going to be as qualified for high school as some of their peers.”

In addition, teachers expressed frustration over the significant increases in workload that the increasing numbers of beginner ESL students impose upon them. A high-school English teacher stated “It takes far longer to mark an incompetent paper. English budgets have been cut and we have tons of ESL students. It is a lot more work”.

Corporate Funding

¹ Information provided in secondary school focus group

With the reduction in public funding for schools, another option to pay for basic services and infrastructure (books, chairs, playgrounds, computers, etc) has been the acceptance of corporate funding of public schools. Parallel to this problem is competition between public and private schools.

Privatization

Private schools, according to the teachers, are a problem. Private schools tend to be ranked higher on the Fraser Institute tests because, teachers say, the students that attend them are wealthier. Private schools also do not accept so-called ‘problem’ students. An Okanagan elementary school teacher noted that

“one student [in her district] finished his grade 12 in a private school then came back to the public system to bring up his marks in English and Math. [...] He came back into our system, which had him assessed by an Education Psychologist, which through the private system, would have cost him between \$1200-1500. He was designated as a severely learning disabled child. Yet he had gone through the private school system and never had that assessment. But those things are never talked about. If you just take all the good kids who don’t need assistance and put them into private school and you leave all the kids who have issues with poverty and whose parents are struggling, of course our scores are going to be lower.”

Private schools, according to the teachers, have negative affects on students and public schools. They serve to further the gap between wealthy and impoverished parents and students, as the example above indicates. Private schools do not include assessments by Education Psychologists as part of their fees, and students are negatively impacted according to their inability to pay.

Private schools also attract the wealthier parents because they continue to out-perform public schools on the FSA (Foundational Skills Assessment) tests. As another Okanagan elementary teacher noted, “the Catch-22 in preserving the public school system is that you have

to impress the parents with good marks on the tests so that you can beat out the private schools.”

Because funding has been cut for public schools, they need to attract students.

Corporate Curriculum

Teachers are concerned with the effects that curricula developed by corporations have on students. One Vancouver distance education elementary teacher was particularly incensed about an example of corporate curricula that was introduced into his district in 1997.

“In 1997 the Vancouver School District attempted to install an IBM learning-ware program in the elementary system. The argument was that technology in Vancouver schools was far too random. We were told we needed a way to unify the entire district. The introduction of the IBM system meant that everything would be one specific way; the ability for teachers and students to be innovative was irrelevant. IBM is not concerned with innovation. IBM simply sells things. If they only have to create one interface and one set of software, than they can earn a higher profit. Teachers lost a huge amount of professional autonomy. They lost the ability to create programs that are close to the needs of kids. This demonstrates the hazards of commercialization. You don’t want one monolithic company in control of your system. The company will upgrade their products and then demand fees for the upgrades.”

This teacher’s anecdote reveals many issues that teachers feel corporate sponsored curricula carry. Corporate sponsored curricula is not developed in coordination with a child’s actual development; it assumes that all children can be taught with the same methods and learning plans. The main goal of corporations is to produce profit, not to advance education. This is a problem: the quality of the program is less important than the profit that can be made from it. Mentioned by both this teacher and echoed by others, corporate curricula eliminate the professional autonomy of teachers to develop programs in response to individual children as they see fit.

In the example of the teacher above, there was great concern for the future of the distance education program. In his words, “distance education is cheap. There are no infrastructural costs. So selling packages of distance ed. software has the potential for huge

profits.” He was concerned that distance education would be packaged and sold by a multinational corporation for immense profit at the detriment of the quality of individual programs.

Sponsorship

“I have this newspaper article here that talks about Costco training their employees to go in and deliver a program to [an Okanagan Elementary School]. Well, maybe they can take over *my* job. Because if all they have to do is deliver this program, which sounds like it works on fluency, which sounds like it is really just repeated readings, over and over again, and if it really works, hey, let’s buy the program.” - Okanagan elementary teacher

Teachers are also distraught about the influence of sponsorship programs. Again instituted to make up for the lack of funding, initiatives like Costco and Starbucks reading programs are distrusted. They are corporations as well, and teachers see these developments as a form of advertising.

Another sponsorship issue that was surprisingly not covered in any of the interviews or focus groups is contracts with soft-drink companies and the like. It would be interesting to hear teachers’ comments on this type of funding, although it seems reasonable to assume it would probably include similar distrust.

Improve Efficiency

The official reasoning behind the Ministry of Education’s striving for accountability in teaching through the heavily weighted use of standardized test scores, is so that the students will be ensured a solid education, and that both students and parents have the right to know how their achievement ranks among their peers. This sounds like a reasonable aspiration. However, the public posting of test scores and the intra/inter district competition thereby fueled has brought a sense of anxiety and expectation to students, parents, teachers and principals. Though most educators would

never strive for a lowering of their efficacy in teaching, and as a matter of fact welcome ideas and methods for increasing their own efficiency, what is not welcome is a “top down” approach to the teaching of curricula. Such an approach destroys a teacher’s sense of autonomy, and does not honor his/her professional wisdom and experience in the complex art of teaching.

Management and Control

With an increased scrutiny on test scores from individual schools and classes, principals are often feeling pressure from their superintendents to increase test scores in each classroom, in every grade, and on a school wide level as well. This ultimately has prompted principals to pressure teachers to forego enrichment programs and activities (such as arts) in order to focus more on the “basics” (reading, writing, arithmetic) as mentioned earlier in this report. Teachers are feeling an increased sense of being micromanaged in the following ways: from *how* they are conveying the curricula to students, to exactly which curricular items are used. With the increased emphasis on test scores, a teacher’s capacity to gauge a student’s ability and then teach him/her at that specific level and upwards incrementally, is being increasingly ignored. This results in a teacher’s acknowledgement of the student’s progress and growth, while not necessarily “up to par” with standardized testing norms, becoming increasingly disregarded by the principal. An Okanagan elementary teacher addresses this point: “What I’m saying is that we could measure things differently if we were to acknowledge the professionalism and the ability of the teacher to measure things in their own classroom, then you would be able to open the door to the possibility of so much more measurement that would be relevant.”

In regards to the teaching of subject matter that teachers find enriching and relevant instructionally, a Kelowna elementary teacher addressed the loss of professional autonomy teachers are beginning to feel: “The principals don’t want you to work on in [curricula they consider

superfluous], because that's not what the superintendents are coming down on them to improve. We are working under a deficit model-looking for accountability, but not in the progressive sense more as checks and balances-the questions are not consensus questions."

Funding from Parents

Raising funds from parents

Funding for education comes from the Ministry of Education. But funding doesn't seem to offer enough to teachers, students, nor schools for the opportunity for a quality education complete with enrichment activities (such as field trips, and the arts in schools). What fundraising endeavors help pay for are not extravagant, unnecessary expenditures. They are modest, yet important learning experiences such as: seeing a play once a year, or doing a special art project which coincides with a thematic unit. Parents are often recruited, cajoled, or burdened with a sense of guilt to bridge the gap between funds necessary for important educational experiences and those which are actually available from the school or district. Teachers, time and again, mentioned the amount of time and energy such fundraising takes away from their teaching, and from parents' time and energy that is sorely needed by the school in other activities. A Coquitlam elementary teacher lamented the last point: "All this fundraising takes away from parents ability to be involved in the schools." The sense of fundraising encroaching on a teacher's already busy school day is illustrated by a Surrey elementary school teacher: "There were a few weeks at the beginning of terms where every morning I just seemed to be taking bags of money to the office." The most striking example of why the reliance of fundraising to bridge the gaps in education funds is an inadequate method is that it results in the stark inequity of funds available to schools (and therefore, communities). An elementary school teacher from Coquitlam attests to this point: "In Burnaby they raised \$5,000, in

Coquitlam \$75,000, and in North Vancouver \$150,000 was raised. An in Coquitlam that was more than 40% of the budget.”

Increasingly, the “top down” push for increased test scores/school ranking has been creating an environment where management in education is considering it appropriate to streamline their approaches to the education of students. A business-type model of growth and achievement of students, classrooms, grade levels, and schools can be reduced to viewing teachers and their particular curricular programs as wither achieving or falling short of benchmarks. In this model the teacher and the curricula used thereby becomes the investment, while the students who score at or above grade level are the dividend. Such a reductionist approach is blind to the complexity of the educational endeavor (such as the numbers of second language learners, special education students, socio-economic level of the students, etc. in a particular class, grade level or school). An Okanagan elementary teacher gives an example of this:

“At a recent meeting, there was a term used that was going to be a determining factor in the assessment of programs and teachers. That assessment would be ‘value added.’ Apart from being extraordinarily offensive that we would be considering a ‘value added’ terminology, which is something you use for *raw lumber*, to discuss the success of children, how are you going to determine what value you had added?”

What this is doing to Kids

“High stakes testing” (as standardized testing was referred to by a BCTF office holder and secondary teacher) has driven the emphasis in education away from the process and progress involved in the individual learning of students, to an atmosphere of harried anxiety trickling down from superintendents to principals, from teachers to students, and to parents as well. Students are being compared to other students (sometimes by their own parents who know other children’s scores). “Best educational practices” and developmentally appropriate approaches to education and practices in the classroom are being minimized as the push for testing achievement increases. The

move away from approaching education in a developmentally appropriate manner is evidenced in this quote from a Kelowna elementary teacher:

“When I first started teaching in the 1970’s, I remember the kindergarten program clearly. If, by the end of the program, kids could hold scissors, print their name, recite the alphabet, count to ten, and play socially with other kids that was pretty much what they were expected to do. Now they’re expected to know the names of the letters, and the sound of the letter, be able to produce a word that starts with that letter, be able to count to 100, write the numbers. The pressure on kindergarten children, age 4 and 5 years old, that changes that have happened in 35 years, it is absolutely phenomenal.”

An overdeveloped sense of competitiveness on the part of some students was a real concern of teachers as well. Particularly worrisome is the degree to which some of the students’ self-esteem and self-worth is tied up to their test scores, and ranking between them and their peers. An elementary teacher with 25+ years of experience noted the following: “Students are more competitive- if you are not ‘top dog’ then you are no good.” And, “Students say ‘If it’s not on the test then we don’t want to hear about it’-but the whole thing is probably more stressful to kids and the kids seem really stressed out.” High stakes testing is setting students up to become less appreciative of learning for the sheer joy of it, and the process of it, and instead becoming preoccupied with a narrower group of facts and methods learned at school.

Conclusion

What we learned from the process (collaboration)

Taking part in the research of the Globalization and Education project enabled us to dive into the collaborative process at three levels. The first level was the simple reality of having us work together as a group for the anthropology course we were taking. The second level was the filtering of, and synthesis of the concerns of the interviewees and the focus groups. The last level of the collaborative process was the collection of our data, and the processing of it into an appropriate format for project overseen by Dr. Hans Schuetze and Larry Kuehn.

In the course of creating this document, we learned many important traits and processes of collaboration. The first is that creating a “multi-vocal” document takes much more time than a singular author’s work. Yet this multi-vocal process allowed us as to cover much more research ground than would have been possible if we had worked alone. This was a project of collaboration between students on how to discover, convey, and then document complex subject matter in a relevant and clear manner. Particularly challenging was attempting to untangle the influence of globalization from other unrelated changes. On the technical side, we quickly discovered that transcribing interviews and meetings takes much more time than we ever would have expected. A welcome discovery was that the interviewees and focus group members were more interested in talking at length about these issues than we had expected. This was because the subject matter held great importance to them.

What we learned from the findings (education)

What struck us in this project was that though the teachers are dealing with a number of pressures related to the globalization of education, they retain a high level of commitment to their students and the communities they serve. They have proven to be resilient in the face of changes such as a loss of resources in the teaching of increasing numbers of second language students, and loss of professional autonomy to mention a few. The changes documented are taking an obvious toll on teachers, yet the greatest concern voiced by them were the detrimental effects such changes were having on their students. As the future leaders and contributing citizens of the province and country, this concern should not be weighted lightly.

Overall there seemed to be a very significant discrepancy between the stated concerns and solutions enacted by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the impact of these solutions of teachers and students in the Province. While, the Ministry sees British Columbia’s education system as inadequate and inefficient, the teachers see that the system performs remarkably well in

light of the very significant constraints that it faces (This difference in views is shown graphically in Appendix 4). Teachers also see the current interventions in the education system to be misguided at best, as they result in increased inequity and decreased results for those very sectors for whom the government claims to be assisting.

Perhaps the most heartening thing that we learned from the entire process was that teachers are thinking long and hard about the impacts of globalization on their teaching practice and they recognize clearly the differences between the rhetoric that is driving the current changes and the perhaps less noble goals that underpin it and they are dedicated to do what they can to protect public education. From all that we have learned they have a long battle ahead and will need support from a broad range of social sectors across the World. That is what makes the current Globalization and Education Research project so important in bringing together teachers from around the globe to work together on these issues. Hopefully our small effort can contribute to enabling the professionalism and commitment of British Columbia teachers to ensuring that a high quality education is available to all people in this Province be recognized and supported more broadly in our society.

“I think there’s a push to strip away our autonomy. But also to strip away our integrity. Any teacher who has integrity understands the role of the public education system is to educate children to promote a citizen at the end of the process, who’s functional in a democratic society. That’s what I see my role as. It is not specifically to create a skilled scientist or an author or an artist. Those may be some of the outcomes, but my job is to educate. To give them a life-long love of learning, to deal with problem situations when they’re out there on their own, to be able to deal with those situations in a responsible and beneficial way to society. And I think that we’re coming into a distinct conflict between our role as educators as opposed to our role as trainers.” – Vancouver Elementary Teacher

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